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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA'S ELECTIONS: RULING PARTY WINS, COUNTRY
LOSES

REF: SKOPJE 356

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Macedonia's June 1 snap parliamentary elections resulted in an expected victory and absolute majority for the ruling VMRO party. Despite numerous international community (IC) and media appeals for free and fair elections in the run-up to Election Day (reftel), voting was marred by numerous incidents of gross election irregularities, including ballot-stuffing, voter intimidation, and violence that resulted in one fatality and several injured. While governing coalition partners VMRO and DPA labeled the elections "free and fair," opposition SDSM and DUI, and IC and local observers condemned the violence and intimidation, which included illegal detention of election observers. PM Gruevski has pledged to conduct reruns in all disputed areas, to punish all persons responsible for the violence, and to delay coalition talks until after free and fair reruns are held. End summary.

UNSURPRISING ELECTION RESULTS

2. (SBU) As expected, governing VMRO won an absolute majority of seats in Macedonia's June 1 early parliamentary elections, followed by its rival SDSM. Results for the two biggest eAlbanian parties, DUI and DPA, remain uncertain pending DUI appeals of the voting in two of the country's six electoral districts where there were widespread instances of fraud. Two smaller parties --eAlbanian party PDP and Macedonian Muslim party PEI-- may succeed in getting one MP seat each. With 98% of the ballots counted, the State Electoral Committee (SEC) has put overall voter turnout at 57.45% of all eligible voters. Using SEC figures, the following parties are expected to enter Parliament:

VMRO -- 64 MP seats (479,219 votes)
SDSM -- 28 MP seats (231,978 votes)
DUI -- 14 MP seats (107,230 votes)*
DPA -- 12 MP seats (100,569 votes)*
PDP -- 1 MP seat (8,847 votes)
PEI -- 1 MP seat (7,669 votes)

*likely to change after reruns

ELECTIONS MARRED BY VIOLENCE...

13. (SBU) Early on the morning of June 1, in the village of Aracinovo near Skopje, police engaged in a firefight with DUI activists, resulting in one fatality and at least five wounded persons. While the police claimed they returned fire after a group of armed civilians shot at them from a house, DUI said the victims were on their way out of a polling station (PS) when the police opened fire. There also were reports of an additional casualty, who is in critical condition, after a shooting incident near DUI headquarters in Cair, a suburb of Skopje.

...INTIMIDATION, AND UNLAWFUL DETENTION

14. (SBU) The Mission's election monitoring teams registered instances in which people were physically prevented from voting and were otherwise intimidated after talking to international observers. Around noon, armed DPA activists in the village of Poroj prevented a U.S. observer, her teammates, police, and SEC officials from leaving a polling station (PS) and threatening them with death if they attempt to leave. The incident occurred when SEC officials, accompanied by police, arrived to remove ballot boxes and close the polling station because DPA had ejected the municipal election board and replaced it entirely with DPA personnel. A DPA MP ended the incident with a negotiated "settlement," in which the captives were released if the SEC officials agreed to permit the ballot boxes to remain and the unaccredited DPA election board to continue to operate the PS. The DPA operatives also confiscated the weapons of the police on the scene. PM Gruevski told the Ambassador he

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would follow up to ensure prosecution of the perpetrators.

...OTHER IRREGULARITIES

15. (SBU) Signs of numerous election irregularities, especially in Electoral District 1 (Skopje area) and Election District 6 (northwestern Macedonia), started coming in as early as the opening of the polls at 7 a.m. on June 1. Irregularities reported included: massive ballot stuffing; ballot burning; destroying ballot boxes; use of weapons in close proximity to the PS; physical assaults on PS officials; and chasing observers out of a PS. By mid-afternoon, over 60 PSs had been closed or had suspended operations, and were deemed unsafe even for the police. Local election observation NGO MOST reported that 97 of its observers had been withdrawn for security reasons, or were prevented from doing their jobs in a number of PSs. In the rest of the country, there were reports of sporadic family voting, proxy voting, and other incidents, but the overall situation was much calmer.

GOVERNING PARTNERS: "A VICTORY FOR MACEDONIA"

16. (SBU) Hours after the polls closed, governing VMRO leader Gruevski said the elections were "an enormous victory" for the whole country. He added that there would be reruns in a limited number of places to ensure that "each and every MP is elected fairly." In a triumphalist speech, DPA's Thaci added that this was DPA's "sweetest victory" and rejected any need for reruns. (Note: Preliminary results point to a DUI victory, but Thaci insisted that DPA was the party that received more votes. End note). Despite independent observer assessments that Thaci's party was behind the majority of election irregularities throughout the day, Thaci blamed rival DUI as the main culprit. (Note: In a June 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Gruevski pledged that there will be no coalition talks until after reruns are completed in a free and fair manner in the next two weeks. End note)

OPPOSITION: "THE PRICE IN HUMAN LIFE WAS TOO HIGH"

¶17. (SBU) Opposition SDSM leader Sekerinska congratulated VMRO for its victory, but added that the fatality and other violent incidents indicated that the conduct of the elections had been "unacceptable." DUI's Ahmeti said that, rather than a "day of joy and freedom," Election Day had been "a blood bath" orchestrated by DPA. He added that the results in Election District 6 and in the municipality of Saraj in Election District 1 were unacceptable because of intimidation of observers and electoral officials.

OBSERVERS CONDEMN IRREGULARITIES

¶18. (SBU) Throughout the day on June 1, the Embassy was in touch with all parties, urging them to calm their activists and stop the violence. The Ambassador called the PM and urged him to exert pressure over his coalition partner DPA to stop the harassment and violence. Her intervention appeared to result in the early afternoon arrest of DPA-affiliated crime boss Agim Krasniqi and some of his associates, all of them implicated in numerous violent incidents on Election Day, on charges of organizing a group to prevent others from voting.

¶19. (SBU) On June 2, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) made public its preliminary conclusions from the June 1 elections. Although the elections were "well administered procedurally," ODIHR assessed that Macedonia had failed to meet "key OSCE and Council of Europe commitments" due to "a failure to prevent violent acts" and "the limited and selective enforcement of laws." ODIHR concluded that the overall assessment of the June 1 elections "will depend on whether the authorities will thoroughly investigate these serious violations."

¶10. (U) Earlier the same day, the local election monitoring NGO MOST said that "isolated but serious" incidents had

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tarnished the integrity of the elections in certain areas of the country. Only the SEC's readiness for quick and efficient reruns in a wide range of "problematic places," according to MOST, would improve the overall situation after the elections.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) These elections represent a significant setback for Macedonia's democratic development, and for its NATO membership prospects. We, the EU, OSCE, and ODIHR have given the GOM room to repair the damage, however, if the government ensures free, fair and peaceful reruns. Gruevski has pledged to do that, and we will do our utmost to ensure he follows through on his commitment and returns Macedonia to the positive course it was on before he made the fateful decision to call the early elections.
Milovanovic